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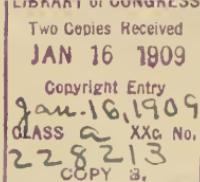
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Lincolniana

# THE BOY LINCOLN

EASTMAN JOHNSON

1824-1906

CONCERNING THE ARTIST. Johnson was born in the small town of Lovell, Maine. He was not particularly studious at school, but at an early age showed a decided bent for drawing. When eighteen, he did some good portraits in crayon, and his talent developed so rapidly that at the age of twenty-one we find him established in a room of the Capitol at Washington, executing portraits of many distinguished Americans. From his eighteenth year to his eighty-second, Johnson accomplished an almost incredible amount of work, being endowed with unfailing good health as well as inexhaustible enthusiasm and rare singleness of purpose. The enumeration of his portraits is like a roll-call of names familiar in history, literature, finance, statesmanship, the professions, and society. The list ranges from the widow of Alexander Hamilton to Grover Cleveland. After a year in Washington, he spent three in Boston, painting portraits; among the distinguished people who sat to him were Longfellow, Emerson, and Hawthorne. He then went to Europe to study in Düsseldorf, Paris, and at The Hague, where he remained four



years. That wizard of the Dutch school of painting, Rembrandt, made the deepest impression on him, — so deep, indeed, that Johnson's artist friends called him the American Rembrandt. With years he developed a strong type of genre painting, — strong because it is never melodramatic or sentimental. It tells the truth about incidents of everyday life, often touched by quiet humor. Johnson's art is expressive of a personality of great kindness and freedom from all morbid tendencies. He was a patriot in the best sense of the word; he found inspiration in American subjects, which he portrayed to the end of his career. The Boy Lincoln was drawn in 1867, and was given to Berea College by Mrs. Mary Billings French, who purchased it of Mrs. Eastman Johnson.

**CONCERNING THE PICTURE.** First of all let us enjoy the language of the artist. It tells a story of homely comfort, and conveys the feeling that although poverty reigns, this boy's life is not sordid or devoid of interest. What is it that dignifies and uplifts the narrow horizon of life in such surroundings? A love of books, a reaching out of mind and heart toward the great world beyond this cabin. Johnson has given a sense of warmth and comfort by contrasting light and shade. The imagination of a lover of the fire on the hearth — a true fire-worshiper — will be roused at once. He knows the wealth of enjoyment, beyond all consideration of rich surroundings, in blazing logs wherein air castles are outlined and all the disagreeable things of life are in abeyance. He feels the beauty of the firelight reflected upon the walls, and its fine defiance of heavy shadows. It glorifies them, and the golden duskiness is as beautiful in the rough log cabin as in a palace. The colors in the original drawing are subdued yet warm. The glow of the fire beautifies the old field-stone of which the fireplace is built, and lingers with tenderness about the form of the boy, till it finds his face and makes it the high light and controlling interest in the picture.

There is nothing more appealing to a healthy soul than the earnest face of a half-grown boy, fraught with latent possibilities not only for his own future well-being but for that of his fellow-men. The boy sitting in the firelight, roughly clad and roughly housed, is, to paraphrase Burns, a king for a' that and a' that, for his face promises something of definite purpose for the future. The artist might have expressed this for any thoughtful boy developing into potential manhood, but it is a vision of Abraham Lincoln as a boy that he has evoked, and in response memory evokes the past. From the shadows of a hundred years emerges another fireside, by which a mother sits holding her baby. Nancy Hanks Lincoln is the mother, and the tiny human being encircled by her arms is her son Abraham. The boy's childhood, lived in unlovely surroundings and grinding poverty, passes in review, and the picture makes a new and close appeal to our hearts and minds. From what source came the boy's strength of character, his temperate habits, his tenderness of heart, his reverence, and the other sterling qualities which blossomed into a type of manhood that has been a blessing to the world?

Lincoln came from good old English ancestry transplanted in colonial times to America. Their sturdy characteristics lived again in their descendant, enriched by his gracious spirit and genius for extracting the good from life's experiences.

In his maturity Lincoln said: "God bless my Mother! all that I am or hope to be, I owe to her!" She died when he was eight years old, but she had taught him to read and write; the Bible was her text-book. Long years afterward her son read to wounded and dying soldiers from his mother's Bible.

Lincoln's stepmother came as a blessing to the forlorn household, especially to Abraham. She encouraged his efforts to obtain an education, and became in all ways his stanch and well-loved friend. The boy was father of the man who wrote the Gettysburg address — a masterpiece

of simplicity and beauty of literary style, — to have helped him develop his powers was truly its own great reward. As we look at the picture what may we not recall of Lincoln's wonderful and unique career from childhood to the supreme hour in which his life was made the price of his patriotism?

**SUGGESTED QUESTIONS.** To what in the picture are you first attracted? Do you like the boy's face? By what light is the boy reading? Do you see the great blazing logs on the hearth? Of what kind of stone is the fireplace built? What do you mean by field-stone? Why is this boy particularly interesting? Did you ever hear of a boy who lived in a log cabin and early in life worked on a farm, cut wood, and did other heavy work? What was his name? Did Lincoln continue to be poor and without education? What do you know about his progress in life? Do you think the story of his life can be helpful to boys and girls? It is suggested that teachers tell their pupils about the mountaineers of Kentucky, the college at Berea, and in what ways Lincoln's early life was like theirs.

"I have an inexpressible desire to live till I can be assured that the world is a little better for my having lived in it." **ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

Lincoln was once riding over the prairie with a party, when they noticed a couple of fledglings fallen out of the nest. After the party had gone on a little distance, Lincoln wheeled, rode back, and replaced the nestlings. When he rejoined the cavalcade, one of the men bantered him about his charitable act, saying: "Why did you bother yourself and delay us about such a trifle?" "My friend," was the response, "I can only say that I feel the better for it!"

MRS. BIXBY, BOSTON, MASS.

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON,  
Nov. 21, 1864.

**DEAR MADAM,** — I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.**

#### *SUGGESTED READING*

Abraham Lincoln. *A Short History*, by John G. Nicolay. New York: Century Co.

Lincoln. *Passages from his Speeches and Letters*. Introduction by Richard Watson Gilder. New York: Century Co.

The Berea Quarterly, published by Berea College, Berea, Ky.

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